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THE DRAMA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

I

EVERYWHERE in Europe the modern drama has been evolved from out the drama of the middle ages; but the development had been slower in France than in Spain and in England; and this retarding of its evolution was fortunate for the French, since the golden days of their dramatic literature arrived only after the conditions of the theater had become far less medieval than they had been during the golden days of the Spanish and of the English dramatic literatures. It was natural that the more modern form of play should be taken as a model by the poets of the other countries, the more especially at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the French were everywhere accepted as the arbiters of art, the custodians of taste, and the guardians of the laws by which genius was to be gaged. In England the Puritans had closed the places of amusement and had thus broken off the theatrical traditions that ran far back into the middle ages; and when the playhouses opened again after the Restoration, the managers had to gratify new likings which king and courtiers had brought back with them from France. Even tho the plain people in London continued to prefer the plays of Shakspeare to belauded adaptations from Corneille or Racine and to icily decorous imitations like the 'Cato' of Addison, and even tho the plebeian folk in Madrid still relished the plays of Lope de Vega and Calderon, the English men-of-letters and the Spanish men-of-letters were united in taking an apologetic tone toward the earlier

dramas which had pleased their less cultivated forefathers. In England as in Spain the learned critic was willing to admit that these earlier dramas had a certain rough vigor which might move the uneducated, but he had no desire to deny that they wanted art. For instance, Doctor Johnson, when he brought out his edition of Shakespeare in the middle of the eighteenth century and when he ventured a timid suggestion that possibly the so-called rules of the theater were not absolutely infallible, seems to have felt almost as tho he was taking his life in his hands.

In Italy and in Germany, as in England and in Spain, the men-of-letters maintained the necessity of conforming to the theatrical theory of the French, because they believed the French to be the only true exponents of the Greek tradition, which it was the bounden duty of every dramatic poet to follow blindly. The rules of the theater as the French declared them had only a remote connection with the Greek tradition; and they consisted mainly of purely negative restrictions. They told the dramatic poet what he was forbidden to do, and they declared what a tragedy must not be. To accord with the demands of the French theory a tragedy should not have more or less than five acts and it should not be in prose; it should deal only with a lofty theme, having queens and kings for its chief figures, and avoiding all visible violence of action or of speech, and all other breaches of decorum; it should eschew humor, keeping itself ever serious and stately, and never allowing any underplot; and, above all, it should permit no change of scene during the whole play, and it should not allow the time taken by the story to extend over more than twenty-four hours.

These were the rules to conform to which Corneille cramped himself and curbed his indisputable genius, with the result that he is to Shakspeare "as a clipped hedge is to a forest,"—to quote an unsympathetic British critic. A certain likeness to the virgin woods is discoverable in the Elizabethan drama, whereas the drama of Louis XIV. resembles rather a pleasure-park laid out by some such architect as Lenôtre. French tragedy had a graceful symmetry of its

own, but it was lacking in bold variety and in imaginative energy. Here is an added reason why it was widely acceptable in the eighteenth century, which has been termed "an age whose poetry was without romance" and "whose philosophy was without insight." The century itself, rather than the French example, is to blame if it has left so few poetic plays deserving to survive. What Lowell called "its inefficacy for the higher reaches of poetry, its very good breeding that made it shy of the raised voice and the flushed features of enthusiasm," enabled the century to make its prose supple for the elegancies of the social circle and for the literature which sought to reflect these elegancies. "Inevitably, as human intercourse in cities grows more refined, comedy will grow more subtle," so De Quincey declared; "it will build itself on distinctions of character less grossly defined and on features of manners more delicate and impalpable."

II

A FLEXIBLE prose is plainly the fittest instrument for the comedy-of-manners; and the comedy-of-manners is as plainly the kind of drama best suited to the limitations of the eighteenth century. By their comedies rather than by their tragedies are the dramatists of that century now remembered. Their comedies, like their tragedies, were composed in imitation of French models; but the influence of Molière was as stimulating as the influence of Corneille and Racine had been stifling. Within a few years after Molière's death the type of comedy which he had elaborated to suit his own needs and to contain his own veracious portrayal of life as he saw it had been taken across to England by the comic dramatists of the Restoration, some of whom had borrowed plots from him and all of whom had tried to absorb his method. No one of the English dramatists had Molière's insight into character, or his sturdy morality. Congreve and Wycherley, Farquhar and Vanbrugh helped themselves to Molière's framework only to hang it about with dirty linen. At times Molière had been plain of speech, but he was ever clean-minded; whereas the English dramatists of the Resto-

ration were often foul in phrase and frequently filthy in thought also.

Clever as these Restoration comedies were and brilliant in their reflection of glittering immorality, their tone was too offensive for our modern taste, and scarcely one of them now survives on the stage. Yet the form they had copied from Molière they firmly established in England, where the conditions of the theater had come to be like those in France; and this form has been accepted by all the later comic dramatists of our language, who have never cared to return to the looser and more mediæval form which had to satisfy the humorous playwrights under Elizabeth. Steele and Fielding and, later in the century, Goldsmith and Sheridan continue in English comedy the tradition established by Molière. In 'She Stoops to Conquer' and in the 'Rivals' there is an element of rollicking farce not quite in keeping with the elevation of high comedy but not unlike the joyous gaiety which laughs all through the 'Bourgeois Gentilhomme.' In the 'School for Scandal' we have an English comedy with something like the solid structure of the 'Femmes Savantes,' but narrower in its outlook, not so piercing in its insight, and far more metallic in its luster.

The English followers of Molière are many, but they are not more numerous or more amusing than those who in his own country profited by the example he had left. Regnard is almost the equal of his master in adroitness of versification and even in comic force, in the power of compelling laughter. 'Monsieur de Pourceaugnac' has hardly added more to the mirth of the French than has the 'Légataire Universel.' But Regnard is fantastic and arbitrary in the conduct of his plots; and he lacks the truth to life and the penetration which characterize Molière. Lesage comes nearer, in his knowledge of human nature and in his appreciation of its frailties, altho it is in his novels rather than in his plays that he reveals himself most fully as a disciple of Molière. Like Fielding in England, Lesage in France carried over into prose-fiction the method of character-drawing which he had acquired from the greatest of all comic dramatists.

In the 'Dépit Amoureux' and in the 'Ecole des Femmes' Molière had shown how to set on the stage certain more delicate phases of feminine personality; Marivaux pushed the analysis still further, thereby enriching French comedy with a series of studies of women in love,—women at once ethereal, sophisticated, and fascinating. Broader than Marivaux was Beaumarchais, broader and franker; his psychology was swifter, his action was more direct, and his stagecraft was more obvious. It was 'Tartuffe' and the 'Étourdi' that he had taken as his models, but he was only clever and wily where Molière was transparently sincere; and instead of the large liberality of the dramatist under Louis XIV the dramatist under Louis XVI had a caustic skepticism. The career of Beaumarchais was as varied in its vicissitudes as that of his own Figaro; he was an adventurer himself, like Sheridan, his contemporary on the other side of the Channel. The 'Barber of Seville' was as lively and as vivacious as the 'Rivals'; and the 'Marriage of Figaro' was as scintillating and as hard as the 'School for Scandal.'

There was a disintegrating satire in these comedies of Beaumarchais, a daring bitterness of attack like that of a reckless journalist who might happen also to be an ingenious and witty playwright. Where Molière had assaulted hypocrisy in religion and humbug in medicine, Beaumarchais made an onslaught on the Ancient Régime as a whole. No doubt a portion of the vogue Beaumarchais enjoyed among his contemporaries was due to their covert sympathy with the thesis he was so cleverly sustaining on the stage. He knew how to profit by the scandal aroused by his scathing insinuations against the established order. Yet he was not dependent on these factitious aids, and his solidly constructed comedies reveal remarkable dramaturgic felicity. They have established themselves firmly on the French stage, where they are still seen with pleasure, altho certain polemic passages here and there strike us now as extraneous and as over-vehement. Beaumarchais is the connecting-link between the French comedy of the seventeenth century and that of the nineteenth, between Molière and Augier.

III

ALTHO the French theorists insisted on a complete separation of the comic and the tragic, disapproving fiercely of any humorous relief in a tragedy, they also maintained that comedy should hold itself aloof from vulgar subjects, that it should ever be genteel; and there were some who held that it ought to be unfailingly dignified. Even in England Goldsmith was reproached for having disfigured 'She Stoops to Conquer' with scenes of broad humor "too low even for farce"; and Sheridan in the prolog of the 'Rivals' felt forced to make a plea for laughter as a not unnatural accompaniment of comedy. Without asserting categorically that the drama should be strenuously didactic, many critics considered that it was the duty of comedy, not first of all to depict human nature as it is with its foibles and its failings, and not to clear the air with hearty laughter wholesome in itself, but chiefly to teach, to set a good example, to hold aloft the standard of manners and of morals. Dryden had declared that the general end of all poetry was "to instruct delightfully"; and not a few later writers of less authority were willing enough to waive the delight if only they could make sure of the instruction.

Thus there came into existence a new dramatic species, which flourished for a little space on both sides of the English Channel and which was known in London as sentimental-comedy and in Paris as tearful-comedy, *comédie larmoyante*. The most obvious characteristic of this comedy was that it was not comic; and in fact it was not intended to be comic, but pathetic. It was a mistake that a play of this new class should call itself comedy, which was precisely what it was not, and that by this false claim it should hinder the healthy growth of true comedy with its ampler pictures of life and its contagious gaiety. But the new species, however miscalled, responded to a new need of the times. It was the result of that awakening sensibility of the soul, of that growing tenderness of spirit, of that expansion of sympathy, which was after a while to bring about the Romanticist upheaval.

In England this sentimental-comedy never amounted to

much, even tho it had for one of its earliest practitioners Steele, who claimed that a certain play of his had been "damned for its piety." But Steele, undeniable humorist as he was, lacked the instinctive touch of the born playwright, and his humor was too delicate to adjust itself easily to the huge theaters of London. Steele's is the only interesting name in all the list of writers for the English stage who intended to edify rather than to amuse and who did not regret that their comedies called for tears rather than laughter. That the liking for sentimental-comedy was more transient in England than in France perhaps was due to the fact that the Londoners had already wept abundantly over dramas of an irregular species, not comedies of course, nor yet true tragedies, but dealing pathetically with the humbler sort of people. Of this irregular species Lillo's 'George Barnwell' and Moore's 'Gamester' may serve as specimens. Difficult to classify as these plays may have been, they were moving in their appeal to the emotions of the London citizens; and they must be accepted as spontaneous attempts at a kind of play which the French later in the century were to strive for under the name of *tragédie bourgeoise*, the tragedy of common life, with no vain tinsel of royalty and no false perspective of antiquity.

In France, where comedy and tragedy were more rigorously restricted than in England, the vogue of sentimental-comedy was less fleeting, sustained as it was by the sudden success of the pathetic plays of La Chaussée and by the ardent proclamations of Diderot. With all his intelligence, Diderot failed to write a single good play of his own; but he was swift to see that the prescribed molds of tragedy and comedy, as the French theorists had established them, were not only too narrow but above all too few for a proper representation of the infinite variety of human life. Envyng the larger liberty of the English theater and approving of the *comédie larmoyante* and the *tragédie bourgeoise*, he demanded a frank recognition of the right of these new species not only to exist but also to be received as the equals of tragedy and comedy. Unfortunately Diderot could not sustain precept by example; his own at-

tempts at play-writing were painfully unsatisfactory, and the tearful comedies of La Chaussée were poor things at best, even tho they had won favor for a little while. Perhaps the most pleasing example of French sentimental-comedy was Sedaine's 'Philosophe sans le Savoir'; and in spite of its amiable optimism and its touching situations, the tone of this innocent little play was thin, and its manner was rather argumentative than appealing.

IV

IF we needed proof of the temporary popularity of the ingenuisdomestic drama which pretended to be comedy, altho it preferred tears to laughter, we can find this in the fact that it tempted even Voltaire to essay it. Yet for sentimental-comedy it would seem as tho Voltaire had few natural qualifications, since he was deficient in sentiment, in pathos, and in humor. Wit he had in profusion,—indeed, he was the arch-wit of the century; and he was so amazingly clever that when he attempted tragedy he was able to make his wit masquerade even as poetry. In the drama, as in almost every other department of literature, Voltaire is the dominating figure of his time. He was very fond of the theater, and he had possessed himself of some of the secrets of the dramaturgic art. He could devise an ingenious story; but he had no firm mastery of human motive. However artfully his plots might be put together, they were generally improbable in the main theme and arbitrary in the several episodes.

Even his best tragedy, 'Zaïre,' which is less of an improvisation than most of his other plays, and which still has an intermittent vitality on the French stage, was little more than a melodrama, as the characters existed solely for the situations by which they were created. Altho his versification was feeble, and altho he was never truly a poet, he was sometimes really eloquent. As a dramatist he was often self-conscious, not to say insincere; his mind was on the minor effects of the stage and not on the larger problems of the soul. His conception of tragedy was petty; it was without elevation or austerity; and yet he thought that the French had been able

to improve on the type of tragedy which they had borrowed from the Greeks. He did not see that French tragedy, vaunting itself as absolutely Greek, had acquired from the Spanish drama a trick of complicating its plot with ingenious surprises, than which nothing could be more foreign to the large simplicity of the Athenian drama. He did not perceive that what his countrymen had been trained to expect and to admire in the tragic drama "was a set of circumstances peculiar to that play, with a set of characters common to all French plays in general,—the mesdames et seigneurs of the Spanish 'Cid' of Corneille, the Jewish 'Athalie' of Racine, and the Grecian 'Mérope' of Voltaire" himself.

How widely the ideal of tragedy upheld by the French dramatists under Louis XV differed from that pursued by the English playwrights under Elizabeth, and also from that followed by the Greek poets under Pericles, was made plain by Voltaire's own formal declaration in which he set up a standard of tragedy as he understood it: "To compact an illustrious and interesting event into the space of two or three hours; to make the characters appear only when they ought to come forth; never to leave the stage empty; to put together a plot as probable as it is attractive; to say nothing unnecessary; to instruct the mind and move the heart; to be always eloquent in verse and with the eloquence proper to each character represented; to speak one's tongue with the same purity as in the most chastened prose, without allowing the effort of riming to seem to hamper the thought; to permit no single line to be hard or obscure or declamatory;—these are the conditions which nowadays one insists upon in a tragedy." From this explicit definition it is evident that Voltaire regarded tragedy as a work of the intelligence rather than of the imagination; and it might even be inferred that he distrusted the imagination, and that he thought that the intelligence could be aided in the accomplishment of its task by the rules.

The rules of the theater, including that of the Three Unities, had been adopted in France in the seventeenth century largely because Corneille had given his adhesion to them, altho they held him in a bondage he could not but feel; and

they were maintained in France in the eighteenth century very largely because of the authority of Voltaire, who was ever ready to reproach Corneille for every chance dereliction and to denounce Shakspeare for every open disregard of dramatic decorum. The weight of Voltaire's authority was acknowledged not only in France but throughout Europe. His plays were translated and acted in the various languages of civilization; and his opinions about the theater were received with acquiescence in Italy, in Germany, and in England. It is true that in England, while the professed critics deplored the lamentable lack of taste shown by their rude forefathers, they themselves continued to enjoy the actual performance of the vigorous plays of the Elizabethan dramatists. It is true that in Italy the men-of-letters who accepted the rulings of Voltaire could take little more than an academic interest in the drama, since their theater was not flourishing, and even the comedy-of-masks seemed to be wearing itself out. It is true that in Germany also the theater was in a sorry condition, and that the German actors were often forced to perform in adaptations of French plays in default of native dramas worthy of consideration.

Charming as are certain of the comedies of Goldoni, they are slight in texture and superficial in character; and it is significant that Goldoni himself felt it advisable to leave his native land and to go to Paris to push his fortunes. Significant is it also of the increasing cosmopolitanism of the theater toward the end of the century that the plot of one of Goldoni's Italian comedies was utilized by Voltaire, whose French play was adapted into English by the elder Colman. Lofty as are the tragedies of Alfieri, they have a scholarly rigidity as if they were intended rather for the closet than the stage, altho the simplicity of their structure has made it possible to present them in the actual theater. Italy in the eighteenth century was sunk in corruption or busy with petty intrigue; and it was devoid of the energy of will which is the vital element of the drama. Not only was there little expectation or even hope of national unity: there was in fact but little solidarity of feeling among those who spoke the

language. The French people, and the English also, were each of them conscious of their nationality and proud of it; but the Italians were like the Germans in having neither pride nor consciousness. Italy was only a geographical expression then; and no fervid lyrist had yet proclaimed the large limits of the German fatherland. The Italians and the Germans, whatever their merits as individuals, were then as peoples too infirm of purpose and too lax of will to be ripe for an outflowing of the drama such as might follow hard upon the achievement of national unity and the establishment of a national capital. Very important indeed is the contribution which a city can make to the development of a dramatic literature; and not only Athens but also Madrid, London, and Paris have deserved well of all lovers of the drama.

V

ALTHO the Germans had then no center of national life and had not yet felt the need of it, they had given more proof of resolution than the Italians; and it was in the eighteenth century that Frederick laid the firm foundation of the national unity to be achieved more than a century later. It was in Germany again that there arose a stalwart antagonist to withstand Voltaire, to destroy the universal belief in the infallibility of French criticism, and to disestablish the pseudo-classicism which needed to be swept aside before a rebirth of the drama was possible. Lessing was the best equipped and the most broad-minded critic of esthetic theory who had come forward since Aristotle; and he had not a little of the great Greek's commingled keenness and common sense. The German critic was not so disinterested as Aristotle; indeed, what strikes us now as the sole defect of his stimulating study of the drama is its polemic tone. It was in the stress of a contemporary controversy that Lessing set forth eternal principles of dramatic art. He went into the arena with the zest of the trained athlete; and he was never afraid to try a fall with Voltaire himself. In fact, it was especially in the hope of a grapple with the French dictator of the republic of letters that the German kept his loins girded.

Lessing had not only a courage of his own: he had also the solid learning of his race. He was a scholar, thoroughly grounded and widely read. He knew at first hand the Greek drama and the Latin; he was acquainted with Shakspeare and with Lope de Vega in the original; he was thoroughly familiar with the French theater, and with the criticisms made against it in Paris itself. Original as Lessing was, he profited by the suggestions of his predecessors, and there is no reason now to deny his immediate indebtedness to Diderot. The French critic it was who pointed out the path, but only the German critic was able to attain the goal. What Diderot had happened merely to indicate in passing, Lessing, with his wider knowledge of life, of literature, and of art, was able to accomplish. He took up the French rules of the theater with their insistence on the alleged Three Unities, and he was able to show the baselessness of the claim that they are derived from the practice or the precepts of the ancients. Then he went further and pointed out the inherent absurdity of these factitious restrictions and their fettering effect upon the French dramatic poet, even when they were kept only in letter and broken in spirit.

Lessing destroyed the superstitious reverence for the French theories; but he could build up as well as tear down. German literature was then at its feeblest period; and such original German pieces as might exist were almost as pitiful as the weak imitations of French tragedy. The German theater was battling for life; it was barren of plays worthy of good acting; it was almost as deficient in good actors capable of doing justice to a fine drama; and it attracted scant and uncultivated audiences without standards of comparison and therefore with little appreciation of either the dramaturgic art or the histrionic. Like Aristotle, Lessing had grasped the complex nature of the dramatic art, with the necessary correlations of playwright and player; and, like Aristotle again, he never thought of a drama as a work of pure literature, but always as something intended to be performed by actors, in a theater, before an audience. The French imitations Lessing strove to eliminate by substitution,—by providing plays of

his own which should be native to Germany in motive and in temper, and which might serve as the foundation for a national drama. He was almost as successful in this constructive effort as he had been in his destructive labors.

A critic Lessing is, no doubt, but a critic who had the rare ability to practise what he preached. In at least three plays he revealed himself as a true dramatist, as a man who had mastered the craft of play-making, and who could present on the stage the essential scenes of a struggle between contending forces embodied in vital characters. The proof of the play is in the acting always; and Lowell did not hesitate to assert that 'Minna von Barnhelm' and 'Emilia Galotti' act "better than anything of Goethe or Schiller." In justification of Lowell's assertion it may be noted that these two plays are nowadays seen in the German theaters quite as often as any two dramas of either Goethe or Schiller.

'Emilia Galotti' and 'Miss Sara Sampson' are tragedies of middle-class life, *tragédies bourgeoises*, owing something to the precept of Diderot and owing perhaps more to the practice of the English dramatists, whom Lessing had also admired. Altho his style is noble and direct, he is not primarily a poet, with the poet's instinctive happiness in finding the illuminative phrase. His culture, his formidable instruction, his resolute thinking, unite to give certain of his dramas a richness of texture uncommon enough in popular plays. 'Minna von Barnhelm' is a comedy, not tearful exactly, nor yet mirthful, rather cheerful, even if grave in spirit. Lessing was scarcely ever gay, altho he could be witty enough on occasion. His dialog has sometimes a Gallic ease, and it has always a Teutonic sincerity. 'Minna' is the best of his plays; it is brisk in action, lively in incident, and ingeniously contrived throughout.

Perhaps the model of which Lessing availed himself unconsciously when his serious plays were taking shape in his mind, was that suggested by Molière's larger and later comedies. But with his practicality and his perfect comprehension of the conditions of the modern theater, Lessing made one important modification in the form of drama

which Molière had supplied. Where the Frenchman, dealing only with the crisis of Tartuffe's career in Orgon's house, had no difficulty in concentrating the action into a single day and a single spot, the German, rejecting the Unity of Time and the Unity of Place, held himself at liberty to protract the action over so long a period as he might find advisable, and to change the scene as often as he might see fit. But Lessing perceived the advantage of not distracting the attention of the audience by changes of scene during the progress of the act; and he therefore made his removals from place to place while the curtain was down. He was apparently the first playwright who gave to each act its own scenery, not to be changed until the fall of the curtain again. Here he supplied an example now followed by the most accomplished playwrights of the twentieth century.

VI

IN this avoiding of the confusion resulting from frequent shifting of the scenery before the eyes of the spectators, Lessing was more modern than either Goethe or Schiller, both of whom—especially in their earlier dramatic efforts, in the 'Goetz' of the one and in the 'Robbers' of the other—appeared to hold that the example of Shakspeare warranted their returning to the more medieval practice of making as many changes of place as a loosely constructed plot might seem to require. Lowell suggested that there was "in the national character an insensibility to proportion," which would "account for the perpetual groping of German imaginative literature after some foreign mold in which to cast its thought or feeling, now trying a Louis Quatorze pattern, then something supposed to be Shaksperian, and at last going back to ancient Greece."

Nowadays Goethe's surpassing genius is everywhere acknowledged,—his comprehensive and insatiable curiosity, his searching interrogation of life, his power of self-expression in almost every department of literature. But great poet as he was, a theater-poet he was not. He was not a born playwright, seizing with unconscious certainty upon

the necessary scenes, the *scènes à faire* to bring out the conflict of will against will which was the heart of his theme. He lacked the instinctive perception of the exact effect likely to be produced on the audience, and he was deficient in the intuitive knowledge of the best method to appeal to the sympathies of the spectators. In fact, the time came in Goethe's career as a dramatic poet when he refused to reckon with the playgoers who might be present at the performance of his plays,—an attitude inconceivable on the part of a true dramatist and as remote as possible from that taken by Sophocles, by Shakspeare, and by Molière. When he was director of the theater in Weimar he did not hesitate to assert that "the public must be controlled." A more enlightened tyrant than Goethe no theater could ever hope to have; and yet little more than sterility and emptiness were the net results of his theatrical dictatorship and of his refusal to consider the native preferences of the Weimar playgoers.

It was Victor Hugo who once declared that the audience in a theater can be divided into three classes,—the crowd which expects to see action, women, who are best pleased with passion, and thinkers, who are hoping to behold character. The main body of playgoers has always wanted to be amused by the spectacle of something happening before their eyes; and many of them, including nearly all the women, desire to have their sympathies excited; but it is only a chosen few who go to the theater seeking food for thought and ready, therefore, to welcome psychologic subtlety and philosophic profundity. The great dramatists have been able to satisfy the demands of all three classes; and 'Oedipus the King,' 'Hamlet,' and 'Tartuffe' were popular with the plain people from their first performance. But Goethe seemed to care for the approval of only the smallest class of the three; and only in 'Faust' did he reveal the dramaturgic skill needed to devise an action interesting enough in itself to bear whatever burden of philosophy he might wish to lay upon it.

Even in his early plays, in 'Goetz von Berlichingen,' for example, in which there is action enough and emotion also,

there is no felicity of stagecraft. It purports only to be a chronicle-play; but altho afterward reshaped for the stage, it was not conceived to suit the conditions of the actual theater. 'Clavigo,' however, which is only a dramatized anecdote, an unpretending improvisation, swift in its action and clear in its handling of contending motives, is effective on the boards; and as a stage-play it is perhaps the most satisfactory of all Goethe's dramatic attempts, trifle as it is after all, devoid of either poetry or philosophy. 'Iphigenia' is a dramatic poem rather than a play; and 'Egmont' is little more than a novel in dialog. So fraternal a critic as Schiller confessed that he found 'Iphigenia' to be wanting in "the sensuous power, the life, the agitation, and everything which specifically belongs to a dramatic work." But if final proof is needed that Goethe, however various and powerful as a poet, was not a born playwright, it can be found, outside his own attempts at the dramatic form, in his alteration of 'Romeo and Juliet.' In this he not only modified and condensed both Mercutio and the Nurse, but he also substituted a tame narrative for Shakspeare's skilful and spirited exposition by which the quarrel of the two families was brought bodily before our eyes.

VII

A THEATER-POET Schiller was, even if Goethe was not; yet Schiller's first drama, the 'Robbers,' was not written for performance,—altho it soon found its way to the stage-door, after the poet had somewhat restrained its boyish extravagance. Schiller rejected the model he could have found in Lessing's tragedies of middle-class life, a model too severe for the tumultuous turbulence of the storm-and-stress period. He followed Goethe, who, in 'Goetz,' had claimed the right to be formless as Shakspeare was supposed to be. There is in the 'Robbers' a certain resemblance to the crude Elizabethan tragedy-of-blood with its perfervid grandiloquence and its frequent assassination.

In this first play Schiller's stagecraft was primitive and unworthy; he shifted his scenes with wanton carelessness,

and he let his absurd villain turn himself inside out in interminable soliloquies. But however reckless the technic, the play revealed Schiller's abundant possession of genuine dramatic power. The conflict of contending passions was set before the spectator in scenes full of fire and action. The antithesis of Moor's two sons, one strenuously noble and the other unspeakably vile, was rather forced, but it was at least obvious even to the stupidest playgoer. The hero lacked common sense, no doubt; but he had energy to spare; and at the end he rose to tragic elevation in his willingness to expiate his wrong-doing.

Dramatist as Schiller was by native gift, he was but a novice in the theater when the 'Robbers' was written, and it was the fitting of that play to the actual stage which drew his attention to the inexorable conditions of theatrical performance. In his later dramas, in 'William Tell,' for example, and in 'Mary Stuart,' the technic is less elementary and more in accord with the practice of the contemporary playhouse. But Schiller appears to have been thinking rather of his readers than of the spectators massed and expectant in the theater. He seems to have taken no keen interest in spying out the secrets of the stage. His plays are what they are by sheer dramatic power, and not by reason of any adroitness of technic. Indeed, in Schiller's day the German theater was almost in chaos; and probably he never saw a satisfactory performance of a dramatic masterpiece, German or French or English, until he went to Weimar.

Despite his limitations, Schiller was the one dramatic poet of the eighteenth century; he is to be compared, not with Sophocles and Shakspeare, the supreme masters, but rather with Calderon and Hugo. He lacked their conscious control of theatrical effect, but he had something of their rhetorical luxuriance and their exuberant lyricism. He was intellectually deeper than the Spaniard and he was more masculine than the Frenchman. Schiller's influence on the later development of the drama would have been fuller if his structure had been more modern and if he had profited earlier by the example of Lessing, emulating the great

critic's certainty of artistic aim and imitating his rigorous self-control.

But self-control was rarely a characteristic of German poets in those days of impending cataclysm. Lessing had emancipated his countrymen from the tyranny of French taste, from the despotism of pseudo-classicism. Other despotisms survived in Germany, not in literature but in life itself; and a younger generation was ardent for the destruction of these survivals from the middle ages. In Lessing's play the father of Emilia Galotti slew his daughter to preserve her honor, while the evil ruler who was responsible escaped scot-free. In 'Goetz' and in the 'Robbers' the aggrieved hero was ready to turn outlaw on slight provocation, and to avenge individual injuries on society at large. The 'Robbers' especially had the supersaturated sentimentality of the last half of the eighteenth century; and it was filled with the clamor of revolt, which was to reverberate louder and louder throughout Europe until at last the tocsin tolled in the streets of Paris and the French Revolution was let loose to sweep away feudalism forever.

VIII

THE most of the German dramas of this period of unrest were not intended for the actual theater, altho many of them did manage to get themselves acted here and there. With all their wild bombast and with all their overstrained emotionalism, they were not without a significance and a vitality of their own, a freshness of self-expression wholly lacking on the German stage before Lessing had inspired it. If these dramas had been controlled by something of Lessing's self-restraint, if they had been less excessive in their violence, they might have afforded shelter for the growth of a dramatic literature native to the soil and national in spirit. But they were not healthy enough, and they soon fell into decay; and what did burgeon from their matted roots was the melodrama of Kotzebue, with its exaggeration of motive, its hollow affectation, and its tawdry pathos. Kotzebue's taste is dubious and his methods are now outworn;

but his play-making gift is as undeniable as that of Heywood before him or that of Scribe after him. 'Misanthropy and Repentance,' known in English as the 'Stranger,' has caused as many tears to flow as 'A Woman Killed with Kindness'; and whereas Heywood's simply pathetic play was known to his contemporaries only in the land of its language, Kotzebue's turgid treatment of the same theme was performed in all the tongues of Europe, in Paris and London and New York as well as in Vienna and Berlin.

Melodrama bears much the same relation to tragedy and to the loftier type of serious play that farce does to pure comedy. When we can recall more readily what the persons of a play do than what they are, then the probability is that the piece if gay is a farce, and if grave a melodrama. Even among the tragedies of the Greeks we can detect more than one drama which was melodramatic rather than truly tragic; and not a few of the powerful plays of the Elizabethans were essentially melodramas. So also were some of Corneille's, tho they masqueraded as tragedies and conformed to the rules of the pseudo-classics. Yet it was only in the eighteenth century that melodrama plainly differentiated itself from every other dramatic species.

The "tradesmen's tragedies" of Lillo and Moore in England and the tearful-comedies of La Chaussée and Sedaine in France had helped along its development; but it was Kotzebue in Germany who was able at last to reveal its large possibilities. In the pieces which the German playwright was prolific in bringing forth there was something exactly suited to the temper of the times; and this helped to make his vogue cosmopolitan. He was the earliest play-maker whose dramas were instantly plagiarized everywhere; and in this he was the predecessor of Scribe and Sardou. He influenced men like Lewis in England and like Pixérécourt and Ducange in France. In the works of the Parisian playwrights there was a deftness of touch not visible in the pieces of Kotzebue, who was heavy-handed; as Amiel once suggested, it is not unusual to see "the Germans heap the fagots for the pile, the French bring the fire." It was this French

modification of eighteenth century German melodrama which was to serve as a model for French romanticist drama in the nineteenth century.

A century is only an artificial period of time adopted for the sake of convenience and corresponding to no logical division of literary history. None the less are we able to perceive in one century or in another certain marked characteristics. No doubt every century is more or less an era of transition; but surely the eighteenth century seems to deserve the description better than most. For nearly three-quarters of its career, it appears to us prosaic in many of its aspects, dull and gray and uninteresting; but it was ever a battle-ground for contending theories of literature and of life. In the drama more especially it was able to behold the establishment and the disestablishment of pseudo-classicism.

At its beginning the influence of the French had won wide-spread acceptance for the rules with their insistence on the Three Unities and on the separation of the comic and the tragic. At its end every rule was being violated wantonly; and the drama itself seemed almost as lawless as the bandits it delighted in bringing on the stage so abundantly. Throughout Europe, except in France, the theater had broken its bonds; and even in France, the last stronghold of the theorists, freedom was to come early in the nineteenth century. Lessing had undermined the fortress of pseudo-classicism; and the walls of its last citadel were to fall with a crash at the first blast on the trumpet of *Hernani*.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.